PRESENTATIONS

BOSTON AVENUE METHODIST CHURCH

TULSA, OKLAHOMA

FEBRUARY, 3-5, 1991

JOHN M. BUCHANAN, PASTOR
FOURTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CHICAGO

SACRED JOURNEY

1. Adventure
2. Provisions
3. Confidence
4. Power

It is a very great honor to be in Tulsa, and here at this vital church - and to be your guest for the next several days.

The Barton Clinton Lectures over the years have brought to Tulsa a distinguished + important series of speakers + and I am pleased to be numbered among them. | in particular Joseph Sittler - 1970, mentor .. and Rabbi (Luth Theol. at U of C) Herman Schaalman - 1989, my neighbor in Chicago.

My compliments to the founders - + the Church + for this fine gesture - celebrating this the role of preaching - + the role of the intellect in our tradition (Chi. Methodist Temple - downtown, Gene Winkler, -

Pleased to meet your fine minister - about who I have been hearing for years.

~~He tells Bishop Paul Gallow + I have corresponded.~~

I enjoyed a friendship w Bishop Paul Gallow .. corresponded - | sermons - sent by son Paul, daughter - in - law - Margie, neighbors + friends.. | had tea once .. | We loved this church + Dr Biggs. We came

suggested | sermon ideas I might try - + we looked forward to a visit

.. So - along w my gratitude & fond memory of a great man

THE SACRED JOURNEY

1. Adventure

John M. Buchanan

Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago

Scripture
John 3:1-17
Genesis 12:1-9

"Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you...' So Abram went,...journeyed on,..." -Genesis 12:1, 4, 9 (RSV)

Ab. -75

no children

have each other + comfort. routine of 50 yrs.

Can you imagine the day when Abraham and Sarah tried to explain it to their neighbors? Abraham is seventy-five. Sarah is at least that old. They have no children.. What they have, of course, is each other, and the comfortable routines of fifty years or so of life together. Since the day longer ago than they can remember, the day when Abraham's father Terah moved the whole family to Haran, they had lived in one place. Abraham and Sarah were settled, established, comfortable. There's something nice about that. something good about knowing you don't have to move anymore, that

this is the place you can expect to live out your days. There is something comforting about the daily routine and ritual by which time is measured: up at 7:00; coffee and newspaper at 7:30; walk the dog at 8:00; lunch, cocktails, dinner, and TV until bed time; the buffet at the club on Thursdays; not exciting, but no surprises, no problems. Abraham and Sarah are settled, substantial, mature people. → Can you imagine the day when they tell the neighbors they are selling their place, having a garage sale, withdrawing their money from the bank, and leaving? "Where are you going, Abraham? To a retirement village, maybe?" "Well, actually not. Actually, we don't know exactly where we're going. We're headed for the promised land, but we really don't know where it is. So, we're trusting God to show us the way, and to provide for us. And - we hate to mention it - but we're expecting that sometime soon Sarah's going to be pregnant. So we'll be parents, not just of a child, but a new nation. That's a whole other story! Anyway,

retirement?

" we're out-of-here! "

~~out of here~~ a

~~we're leaving."~~

Can't you imagine the neighbors first trying to talk them out of it? "Don't leave home! Enjoy! You've worked hard and done well. You're home safe. Don't throw it all away for a wild dream. You don't know what you're getting into. Things will never be the same again." [~~See Going Home, Robert Raines, p. 271~~] As Abraham and Sarah continue packing, can't you see the neighbors rolling their eyes at this peculiar pair of old eccentrics about to do something if not absolutely crazy then terribly unlikely and inappropriate... and frightening!

We do know a little about moving. In fact, we are more mobile than anybody before us. The average American will move from place to place thirteen times during his or her lifetime, ten times as an adult. The proportion of the population which lives in one place only is now 3%. Every year 17% of us move... [~~Population of the United States - Historical Trends, 1985~~] ~~Until a~~

13 moves

3%

17% move every year

Until a generation ago, many people never moved at all, or what moving they did was down the street, or across town. In the old country, generations lived in the same house. We have visited the farm where they all lived for centuries. My parents lived within a several square mile area all their lives. We have packed up and moved five times, and that's fairly stable. Contemporaries of mine have moved twelve, fifteen, twenty times. IBM, I've been told ruefully by a sequence of friends who have passed through my life, stands for "I've Been Moved."

in Ireland.

We have learned about separation anxiety and the psychological dynamics of loss, and that moving is like losing something precious which in fact it is, and how we can anticipate the occurrence of the grief process - numbness, depression, guilt and anger. The business of moving from place to place leaves us with some emotional fragility and maybe even poverty in addition to exhilaration and energy. We also know that when Genesis 12 says a

MO'

settled seventy-five year old couple hear God telling them to move and promising them a child, and they actually do it, actually trust the voice and move, the Bible is saying something either very silly or very important.

This story of Abraham and Sarah is arguably the most important story in the Bible. In the Abraham saga the Bible makes its first and most breathtaking assertions about the one God. In the first two chapters of Genesis there are stories of creation, a great flood, a high tower and people unable to communicate with one another. There is nothing unique about the theological assertion that God is creator, nor that there are perimeters within which the creatures must live, and that there are severe consequences when these boundaries are crossed. What starts to emerge in the 12th chapter of Genesis is an utterly different idea of God. This is a God who is not content with the way things are in ~~creation~~ going, and so makes a people, a family, a nation to reflect the true intent of the

common to many religions.

creation. This is a God who enters into conversation with people, has a relationship with them. This is an altogether different God who is always making new and unlikely things happen and who expects people to not be too settled, to live loosely, to be mobile enough to respond to the new things God is doing. This is a God who prefers a tent to a building; a God who is suspicious of temples and the trappings of religion; a God who likes to be on the way - in the wilderness - with the people. ~~This is a God whose love allows people freedom and promises to be with them always.~~ This is a God to trust when God calls people to be on a journey of faith, a God who makes of our lives a Sacred Journey.

It is a very old story in terms of literature, older than the stories of creation. It is, some believe, the first and fundamental Bible story. ~~It occurs in the middle of the Bronze Age when people in the area where the story occurs are mostly nomads~~, merchants, a few settled farmers,

~~but not very many~~. And what this story says with sweeping literary beauty is that in all the human history before, things have not gone well. People have rebelled against the basic rules of creation and the result has been alienation, separation, violence. This particular family, of which Abraham is the last member, is itself at a dead end... Old Abraham and his old wife, in their barrenness, are a metaphor for the human condition. They live without hope. They live without passion and love. They live in their settled stability, putting in time until they die, waiting day in and day out for their lives simply to play out.

And it is in their barrenness and hopelessness that they hear the voice calling them to move and promising them a future - as unlikely a promise as anyone ever heard (unless you count something Gabriel said to a young Jewish girl 1,500 years later, about her illegitimate child being the savior of the world). It is an outlandish, almost preposterous, promise. And Abraham and Sarah

But even more outlandish is what happens next.

Act 5 do it!

They believe it, trust it. They pick up and go.

It's important because of what it says about God and about faith and about the world and our own journeys.

It says, first, that the reality of God is not located in the past, but in the future. It says that the power and energy of God is not so much pushing us from behind, out of our memories and traditions, but pulling us from ahead, out of our hope. It says that we do not live in a static, settled world, but one full of possibility because of the activity of God. It is, says Walter Bruggemann, an eloquent Old Testament scholar, a polemic against the notion that we live in a settled state, a static situation in which everything that can be already is. That posture, which is the arid world view of secularism, is essentially atheistic. If God has no power nor potential to change things, to create new possibilities, but exists only as a memory, it is reasonable to question whether that God exists in

any meaningful way and consequently whether worshipping that God is anything other than an exercise in nostalgia or wishful thinking.

But the simple fact is that change is happening radically throughout the world. We are in the middle of a journey - an adventure and where it will end, even our best and brightest don't know. I was intrigued to read one commentator's observation that things begin to ferment spiritually for a generation or so before there is major change at a political level. So what we have witnessed last year transpiring in Eastern Europe has been a stirring of the human spirit for decades, a stirring we know has been occurring in the arts, and in religion long before it was expressed in the streets and the halls of government, a stirring this Abraham material suggests, is surely the activity of this amazing God of the future.

We live in the midst of incredible change, not stability... Megatrends 2.000 details ten major changes in the human situation. But The opening

OK?

Which sermon gimmick were all out of date before the ink dried.

sentences of the book set the pace -

"We stand at the dawn of a new era. Before us is the most important decade in the history of civilization, a period of stunning technological innovation, unprecedented economic opportunity, surprising political reform, and great cultural rebirth. It will be a decade like none that has come before."

[p. 11, John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene]

In point of fact, our oldest story about God suggests that God is a God who likes change, stirs up change, calls people to change, wants people to be free and unencumbered enough to engage creatively with a new world God is creating.

And so the story says a lot about what it means to be faithful. Somewhere we got the idea that to have a religion is to obey the religious rules and believe certain ideas about God. That is, religion is ethics, negatively defined, and theological orthodoxy defined by tradition, custom.

OK?

I confess I liked this section better when I read it than I do this -- Ahh ...

Not that God wills this awful conflict. but precisely that God will be present as a new future unfolds out of it...

However, here in our earliest story, faith is a matter of following the voice, trusting the promise, and courage to live without security, relying on God's providence. Abraham isn't much of a theologian, is not an abstract thinker, doesn't say anything about the nature of God. He simply entrusts his future to God. It's what faith is in the Bible. ~~And from beginning to end Abraham's trust is the example the Biblical writers use to illustrate faith~~. YES A's trust is example

Faith surely doesn't mean saintliness if by that word we mean the steadfast avoidance of the moral ambiguities of life in the world. Read on. As soon as Abraham is finished showing us what faith means he ends up in Egypt looking for food and because Sarah is an attractive woman and he knows will catch the eye of the Egyptians, convinces her to pretend she is his sister instead of his wife - to save his own skin, which is what happens. Sarah ends up as one of Pharoh's concubines for a while and Abraham gets rich

because of the arrangement... until Pharoh discovers that she is actually Abraham's wife and returns her promptly. It is an appalling story, a tale of moral ambiguity and human culpability. And it demonstrates that faith is not moral saintliness.

Abraham and Sarah also have a word to us personally. In Alvin Toffler's important book several years ago, Future Shock, he argued that the way we cope with rapid change in the world around us and the mobility that makes us feel like modern nomads is by building into our lives what he called "personal stability zones"... "To compensate for the rapid change to which they are subjected some people restore dated automobiles, wear clothing styles of earlier eras, or hold rigidly to dated routines. When transience and turnover leave most things up for grabs, to what do people cling? At the deepest level what they cling to is a 'god.'" [see Proclamation 4, Lent, Robert Hughes, p. 27]

And Philip Woodman, in the book we are reading

Philip Wogaman

in the Lenten Academy, Faith & Fragmentation, takes a similar tack. One of the fragments of faith to which people are clinging is the "nostalgic vision" - a vision of piety and church life as we knew it or as we fancy others knew it. It is faith turned inward and backward... In purely personal terms, it may recollect that 'no spot is so dear to my childhood as the little brown church in the dale,' the cherishing of familiar sentimental hymns, the clinging to childhood images of faith and childhood expressions of prayer." [p. 12-13]

The fact is we are talking about something that is a very real part of modern life. Change is frightening, threatening. It belongs to our humanity to want and need security, not adventure and when things outside get a little unstable, to devise "personal stability zones." Religion often becomes one... an experience we can count on to not need change... and to be full of reminders of a gentler, more stable past.

13

It is not a helpful nor faithful posture at this moment -; fleeing to safety of the past... or, too quickly, to the dire predictions of the apolyptics...

Rather, we are called to a steady trust in God of future...

the tendency to seek security of the past

The Abraham and Sarah story is a personal summons to let go of that and to see our lives as a faith journey. It is a summons to think anew, to entertain the truly Biblical notion that God is and has always been present in our own lives, calling, pushing, prodding, enabling, discreetly and subtlety urging us into a new future, working against our tendency to settle down and in, pull in our horizons and live with predictability but not much hope. The story is an invitation to think of your own past as a kind of Sacred Journey, but also your future. ~~Frederick Buechner writes about it... About his surprising decision to enter theological seminary.~~ after establishing himself as a successful fiction writ..

~~Looking back, from the perspective of thirty years, Buechner says eloquently, What many of us can only confess in humility and mystery~~ ("it seems to me now that a power from beyond time was working to achieve its own aim through my aimless life in time as it works through the lives of us all and all our times." ~~[The Sacred Journey, p.~~

95

So the invitation is to trust this God with our future. To let go of the securities and certainties we have come to depend on. To see that we have made gods of them - our investments, our career, our relationships, our pension plans.

"Whatever your heart clings to and relies upon is your god," Martin Luther said. This very old story invites you to identify whatever that is in your life and to let it go: to live without the security and ego support it has provided you and to cling to God, God of the future, God of the journey.

This very old story reflects another story actually. The story of a man who one day walked by fishermen mending their nets and said, "follow me," and they laid down their nets and followed: a story of the one who calls us to discipleship which always means trusting him absolutely with our lives - our futures - even our deaths, letting go of everything.

The promise to Abraham was that there would be a future, a land, an heir and then a nation. Abraham, of course, wasn't personally going to see much of any of it. So what Abraham gets for trusting and following is God - God's company, God's presence, God's promise, God's love.

"Lo, I am with you always," Jesus said, "to the very end of the age."

Even in the darkness "I am with you." Even on the bad days as well as the good days, the ambiguous days, the days of failure as well as success - on every day of your journey "I am with you" which is why it is a **Sacred Journey**.

When I was reading in preparation for this sermon I happened upon something that illustrates. I was reading in Volume 1 of the Interpreter's Bible, a ten volume commentary on the whole Bible, a slightly out-of-date, but still reliable standard reference work. ~~Some of us~~ own the whole ten volumes ~~volume set.~~ I happen to own ~~mine~~ because a dear friend of mine left a note in her papers that if I

were still around when she died, she'd like for me to have her set. She was a widow - a woman for whom the word "lady" is an appropriate description. She was active in church and civic affairs. For years she and a group of similar women met weekly to read and talk about the Bible. They were literate and well-to-do enough that some of them owned the whole Interpreter's Bible. It impressed me when I saw them on her shelves and I told her. It was on that same occasion that she alluded to the sadness and profound pain in her life; how she had had to think new thoughts and do things she never imagined she would have to do in order to maintain the most precious thing in her life, her relationship with her only daughter. She related how very difficult it was for her, both to keep some semblance of a relationship alive, but also to live without the grandchildren and normal family support she always assumed would give her comfort and joy in old age... This little group of women, faithfully and quietly reading the Bible, had

personal but very

sustained her for her very arduous journey. And so I was touched when reading the commentary for Genesis 12 and came upon a paragraph - which my friend Peggy underlined - I imagine, maybe on a day when her own journey was particularly difficult.

"Faith is not the anchor but the hoisted sail, It is not the ship in harbour but the ship that puts out to sea. It is not holding onto something that is, but exploration and adventure toward something vaster that lies ahead."

[Interpreter's Bible, Vol 1, p. 568]

God called Abraham and Sarah. God promised them a future.

God calls you, wherever you are, whoever you are.

God grant you and me - to hear the call, faith to follow, and courage for the adventure, the Sacred Journey.

# # #

You call us into the future, O God.. and you

ask us to trust our lives to you. We confess that it is not easy to do. So in addition to your call, we ask for courage to follow and strength for the journey. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE SACRED JOURNEY

2. Provisions

John M. Buchanan

Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago

Scripture
John 4:5-15
Exodus 17:1-7

"Behold, I will stand before you...and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, that the people may drink." -Exodus 17:6 (RSV)

The late Bruno Bettelheim was one of ~~died last week,~~ ~~one of this city's pioneers and saints.~~ What an adventure his life was! An Austrian Jew who grew up in the Vienna of Sigmund Freud, Bettelheim did pioneering work with disturbed and autistic children. Along with most of the Viennese intelligencia he was rounded up by the Nazis, spent a year in Dachau, and was released through the efforts of Eleanor Roosevelt and others who had heard of his work with autism. He came to this country, to the University of Chicago, where ~~Here~~ he continued important research and treatment.

Chicago's most distinguished + controversial citizens

(2) which has both zealous supporters & severe critics.

In addition to directing a residential treatment center in Hyde Park, he wrote a number of popular books. The most widely read by non-professionals is The Uses of Enchantment, in which Bettelheim explored the importance of fairy tales in the personality development of children. It's a good book and ~~when I took it off the shelf on the day he died last week, I found these opening words which caught my attention because I had been thinking about~~ and in the introduction he made an observation which reminds me of that wonderful story in the 17th chapter of Exodus when the ~~people~~ Children of Israel are in the wilderness and they are hungry and thirsty and scared and they complain and God provides. Bettelheim wrote:

"If we hope to live not just from moment to moment, but in true consciousness of our existence, then our greatest need and most difficult achievement is to find meaning in our lives. It is well known how

many of us have lost the will to live, and have stopped trying because such meaning has evaded them." [p. 3]

Bettelheim wrote a fascinating and very controversial account of his Dachau experience for the New Yorker in which he concluded that the people who survived the concentration camps were those who were able to live for some cultural or religious goal other than mere survival. ~~In the concentration camps,~~ when the total meaning and focus of one's life has been reduced to survival - food and drink - the battle has been lost. Human life has become something less than human. When the oppressors, the captors, or when life itself, reduces human existence to survival terms, humanity has already lost. That is not to say that those who survived concentration were morally superior to those who died. It is, he said, simply to observe that our humanity resides in something bigger and better than the physical needs of our

Bettelheim concluded - what many other people who have experienced the horror of concentration camp - or imprisonment -

Chi Theologian Langdon Gilkey who was ~~taught~~ teacher/professor at Chicago when work broke out + was placed in an Internment Camp - wrote a book - Shantung Compound. makes sense pt..

how prison reduces people to basic needs - + how obsession most people get + difficult + unwordly crisis.. + selfish..

bodies. A relevant observation, I thought, about those people complaining about their thirst in the wilderness.

I continued to skim through the book into the section where he analyzes the familiar fairy tales... Those stories, he taught, often provide children with a safe way to express and deal with basic fears and worries and desires. Hansel and Gretel, whose parents essentially abandon them because they are poor and can no longer feed them, speaks to childhood's "dominant anxiety," the threat of desertion and the loss of security. [p. 159]

It is a common motif in many of the stories we heard as children. Bettelheim observed: "in many fairy tales, being pushed out of home stands for having to become oneself. Self-realization requires leaving the orbit of home, an excruciatingly painful experience fraught with many psychological dangers." [p. 79]

That process, he taught, is inescapable and not confined to childhood. "Separation anxiety - the fear of being deserted - is not restricted to a

Jack & Beanstalk
Cinderella
Little Red Riding Hood
all - got in a lot of trouble when deprived of basic security

certain period of development. Such fears occur at all ages." [p. 15]

And that I concluded, ~~with a timely assist from Dr. Bettelheim~~, is exactly what happened one day in the wilderness of Sinai, when the children of Israel assembled in front of Moses and said: "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?"

It's actually the third time it occurred. In fact, it happens so much that the Old Testament scholars have a name for it... "The murmuring in the wilderness motif." Free of Egyptian slavery, wandering through the desert, the people are murmuring all the time: "What shall we drink?" [15:24] A little later they are hungry and the whole congregation murmurs against Moses and Aaron and this time it's eloquent.

"Would that we had died by the hand of the the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full:

for you have brought us out into the wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." [16:3]

~~For several weeks during this Lenten season~~ I'm proposing in this series of talks that ~~we are thinking about the idea that~~ life is a Sacred Journey, an adventure to which we are called. I suggested this morning ~~last Sunday~~ that the story of Abraham and Sarah is the basic Bible story. In that very old saga, God calls two people who are mature, established and settled to pick up all their belongings and move. God promises them a future and when they trust God, the adventure of faith begins. I suggested that God calls each of us to a similar adventure and promises to be with us, that God has been there all along, urging us on, pulling us from the future, inspiring our hopes and dreams. I suggested that your life is a Sacred Journey because of God's presence.

which many OT scholars think is the oldest story in the Bible -

Furthermore, God promises a child, long after the usual age of menopause - It's preposterous .. only they were only preposterous is that they do it

God has been in our past opening doors here, closing - pushing - ~~making our lives~~ Sacred

The theme runs throughout the Bible, beginning to end. It appears again in the great saga of the Exodus. What a wonderful story it is, with what seems to me an endless variety of ways to

Ad. / Eve - Eden

Think about the very 2-first 6 story of Adam + Eve .. Man + Woman .. ~~The~~ The traditional way of interp. their expulsion from Garden of Eden - (which is absolutely secure + comfortable) is punishment. But there is another interp. + that is that they aren't fully human in there. History starts outside .. (responsibility .. love + tragedy .. And in the way out .. God knits them garments for leaving.

surprise us with its relevance and contemporaneity.

Remember that Abraham and Sarah end up in Egypt for a while because there is no food where they are. Several generations later the Israelites are back in Egypt again, once again because there is famine where they are.* This time there are a lot of them, tribes of them, and this time they stay in Egypt, settle in, and thrive some more: thrive so much that the Egyptians become concerned and gradually turn them into slaves. It happens slowly, of course; first one right, then another is taken away. First they aren't allowed to live in certain neighborhoods, next they have to live in a ghetto and in a few decades they are the slaves, making the bricks for Pharoh's ambitious construction projects.

Moses organizes them: stirs them up, presents their demands to Pharoh: argues, negotiates, threatens - all the while God is urging him on. After several false starts, Pharoh finally relents, and one night, under the cover of

(* remember Jacob & Joseph ~~Egypt~~. who is left to die in dessert - & how Jacob & his sons go to Egypt - for food & are reunited w/ Joseph - who has done very well ... They stay ..

darkness, they leave. They pack up their belongings, gather their sheep and cattle, get the children and the elderly organized, look around at the old neighborhood one last time and walk into the wilderness.

Now the point is that even though they complained a lot, Egypt wasn't all that bad. As a matter of fact, Egypt was home: had been home for them all their lives, and their parents before them and their grandparents. It might look like slavery to a young radical like Moses, but it was also home. And so not long after they leave they begin to have second thoughts. "What in the world have we done? Traded our security, our stable, safe life for what? This is wilderness. There's nothing out here. Egypt isn't wonderful but at least we had a roof over our heads, and food to eat and water to drink." Fleshpots—!

And at the same time, Pharoh is having second thoughts too. His economic advisers, in the clear light of day, remind him that he has just allowed

And fleshpots -- I was disappointed to learn that that intrigue ~~decep~~ word -- referred merely to a pot of lamb stew.

the labor force to walk out scot free. And so Pharoh changes his mind, mobilizes his forces and sends the army out to catch the people of Israel and bring them home.

One of the best parts of this story happens when the people who have made it to the banks of the Sea of Reeds - Red Sea - a broad, shallow swamp - see the dust of Pharoh's army approaching. This time it's not a murmur but a shout of terror:

> "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." [14:11-12]

What comes next is the unlikely escape at the Sea of Reeds and then the beginning of forty years

of wandering in the wilderness of Sinai and the murmuring: "What will we eat? What will we drink? How will we survive, cut off from the security of home?"

It is a universal theme. A universally human question. It has to do with our development and maturity as persons, Bruno Bettelheim taught. It has to do with living life to its fullest. And this we must not miss, it has to do with faith, with living in responsible relationship with the one who has created us, given us our lives, and who calls us to live them with integrity and intentionality and courage. In fact, several thousand years before it was developmental psychology, it was good Biblical religion.

There is a sense in which life always calls us to leave security and comfort behind if we are to do and be all we can: a sense in which life is diminished to the degree that we invest it in the provision of comfort and security only.

~~Comfort~~ 1.

The Outward Bound movement began when Curt

Hahn, a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany and the founder of Gordonstown School in Scotland, observed that young British sailors were perishing, after their ships were sunk by Nazi U-boats in the North Atlantic, in dramatically larger numbers than their older, more seasoned mates. The young sailors were not surviving physical hardship because they didn't have any experience with it or apparently with the spiritual toughness for the will to live. Which is the main ingredient The whole culture - the whole world - after the First World War, had become comfortable, Hahn concluded. So Outward Bound and a number of popular similar outdoor education programs structure physical hardship, challenge and discomfort for people of all ages. It is an intentional wilderness experience and for many people it is life enhancing and spiritually deepening.

It is also an occasion of no little murmuring very much like the wilderness murmuring of the children of Israel. I ~~was a guest of~~ participated in the Outward Bound School, Hurricane Island, Maine, for a five-

summer before last

middle aged

professors
govt. officials
corp execs.
lawyers

day course last summer, along with twenty other adult professional people. It was not forty years in the wilderness by any stretch of the imagination but I'll not forget any of it, including a memorable occasion of murmuring. Robin ~~Lester~~, the Head Master of the Latin School, also a guest and participant, and I had a few moments to chat. We had just come in from three days in a thirty-foot open sail boat. We hadn't slept much; we were cold, wet, hungry, tired, slightly queasy from the ocean swells, and now Robin and I were pulling a large cart full of dirty pots and pans to an open faucet where our job was to scrub them all. On top of everything it was pouring rain. Robin chose that moment to ask something terribly incisive: "What do you suppose our wives are doing right now?" And then, in spite of the fact that we both knew better we began an only slightly tongue-in-cheek recital of what we would be doing: how warm and pleasant and comfortable it would be in Chicago. "Murmuring in the wilderness is a

the best private schools in Chi.

We scrubbed the all-wheeled them down the hill & the dock-whereupon our leader - a young man abt 25 - said - wt clean enough - let the rain do it eq —.

So up the hill in vehicle - cold - rain - & he chose

How we could be each a nice meal at home - CUBS..

universally human experience."

The stories of Harriet Tubman and the underground railroad and slaves running away and living in the wilderness for months - traveling at night, hiding during the day, living off the land - are powerful and inspiring and instructive because for many runaway slaves, slavery began to look appealing after a day or so of freedom. Plantation life might be cruel, inhuman, demeaning, but there was food and shelter and security. The wilderness is the place where we are able to see with clarity how dependent we have become on security, safety and comfort. But, says this wonderful old story, the wilderness journey is also the place where we find God or God finds us.

God comes to Moses in a burning bush in the wilderness. In a period of ~~tempting~~ in the wilderness, Jesus encounters subtle temptation but the angels also come to him in the wilderness and it is in his wilderness experience that his sense of the meaning of his life and therefore his

courage and determination is given to him. Part of the wilderness experience is the solitude in which mind and heart and spirit turn to God. Part of what all the outdoor education programs include is a period of solitary time: an extended period for aloneness, reflection and quiet. And for most, eventually, it is a spiritually significant time.

1 day several days of a few hours — utterly alone

The mystics, the people of deep spirituality, know that to experience God you must detach, back away, let go of everything. That is part of what Israel learns in the wilderness. And it is not an easy lesson for those of us who are privileged and blessed with abundance.

Henri Nouwen has a wonderful little book on prayer which makes the point that you cannot pray with your fists clenched. It's an important observation. Prayer is less than a vital spiritual exercise for most of us because we feel threatened by letting go of our securities and standing before God with our hands empty and open. Nouwen talks about seeing a woman brought into the emergency

with in anger — or in possessiveness

~~about seeing a woman brought into the emergency~~ room of a psychiatric hospital with her fists tightly clenched, holding on to one small coin, as though she would lose her very self if she let go of that coin. Nouwen writes:

"When you are invited to pray you are asked to open your tightly clenched fists and give up your last coin. You hold fast to what is familiar, even if you aren't proud of it. You find yourself saying: 'That's just how it is with me. I would like to be different but it can't be now...' Once you talk like that you've already given up believing that your life might be otherwise. You feel it safer to cling to a sorry past than to trust in a new future."
[With Open Hands, p. 4]

The old story suggests that God calls us to be on a journey, to let go of the securities upon which we have become dependent, to trust God for

our security and in the process to become the free and whole people God has created us to be.

The story also makes a very daring promise. God will provide. God will give us the resources we need for the journey. God will provide, not necessarily what we want, but what we need. God will provide water for our thirst - living water for that profoundest thirst deep inside everyone of us.

But Moses discovers water only when the people are in the dryness of the desert. Manna is provided only in the wilderness. The Samaritan woman who encounters Jesus at the well is thirsty. She is an outcast, not fit for polite company in her own village. She's at that well at high noon because the other women get water in the evening and she is not welcome. She is desperate. "Give me living water," she asks Jesus - "Give me food and drink that will sustain my spirit."

"The threshold of religion," one commentator proposes, "is at that point when the thirsty soul stands squarely in front of the hopeless, barren

desert, the seemingly impossible."

God's gifts are given only when we know our hunger and thirst; only when we need them.

So, for each of us comes a day when we must leave security behind, a day like the one years ago when we walked down the sidewalk, away from the insular safety of home on the way to school and began the adventure of becoming, a Sacred Journey that is still going on.

- or the day years later when our parents dropped us off at college and drove AWAY;

- or the day when we started a new life with a stranger to whom, standing in the FRONT OF a church, young, immature and terribly UNPREPARED, we just committed our lives "for better OR WORSE, in sickness and in health, as long as WE BOTH SHALL live";

- or the day in middle years when our Company

company down sizes, realigns management
and we find ourselves in the wilderness
of unemployment or an
unplanned second career;

- or the day when we and our other
decided we could no longer cling to the
old realities and
remain alive and we find ourselves alone
and starting again;

- or that day when the mortgage is paid,
the dog has died, the last youngster has left
for college and instead of the promised land
you find yourself in
a new wilderness of loneliness, purposelessness,
depression and remorse;

- or the day when the reality of aging
becomes unavoidable, a dear friend dies, or a
routine task becomes difficult, or a life-long
dream has to be abandoned
and you know in a final way that
you are not going to live forever.

a final way that you are not going to live forever.

Comes a day for all of us - and each of us - when we know that our own resources are no longer adequate: that if all we have going for us is our own strength, vigor, intelligence, or our professional accomplishments, our position in the community, or our possessions, our bank accounts, stock portfolios, and pension plans, we really are rather poor and weak. Comes a day for all of us when we are hungry and thirsty and know it; when we are powerless to deal with the realities of our humanness, particularly our own mortality, our own death - at the hands of the approaching Egyptians, or the hunger and thirst burning within us, or simply the inevitable ticking of the clock... And on that day the promise is that God will provide.

The mystery of faith is that in Jesus Christ we are called to lives of intentional insecurity.

The greater mystery of faith is that when we trust God... when we open our hands... when we know

our hunger and thirst... there will be bread and life and living water.

God calls us to a **Sacred Journey.** God provides what we need...
Thanks be to God. Amen

# # #

God of love: you call us into the future, sometimes away from everything we use to establish our security. Give us courage to live faithfully; give us the food and drink we need to live in Jesus Christ
our Lord. Amen.

THE SACRED JOURNEY
3. Confidence
John M. Buchanan

Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago

Scripture
John 9:1-11
1 Samuel 16:1-13

"...the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." -1 Samuel 16:7b (RSV)

Harvey Cox, professor of Theology at Harvard Divinity School, ~~who has written a number of fine books on theology and culture~~ wrote a short memoir a few years ago about his personal faith experience under the title, "Just As I Am." Cox, whose theology is broad, liberal, full of life and has a passion for peace and justice in the world, grew up in a small conservative Baptist Church in Pennsylvania. He recalls that church with fondness and respect and remembers singing the old gospel hymn, "Just as I am, without one plea, But that Thy blood was shed for me."

He reflects: "Though the words may sound

Cox is ~~[illegible]~~ liberal who

3-1 ~~9a~~

X has been in the center of the religious ferment of our generation - from Civil Rights - ~~[illegible]~~ Death of God - Vietnam - & recently to the new agenda of relating to World religions. His first major book - The Secular City was a landmark.. ~~10 years later~~ recently he wrote a sequel about God in the Secular City

He was also the coun of NYT Sun. Mag. ~~[illegible]~~. because his cousin is Basic Xianity is staying room mate at Harvard these days.. In between all that he wrote

lachrymose to many, for me they still convey a sense of comfort and assurance. Was I really acceptable to God 'just as I am?' Was it true that I needed no improvements, no alterations... If true that was very good news to an adolescent who was always being reminded... of my shortcomings and defects."

And then this distinguished intellectual recalls those hazardous days. He wasn't very good at sports, there were better musicians in the band, the girls preferred other fellows. He wasn't the smartest, and although he was sure his parents loved him, he was not at all sure he would ever live up to their expectations.

"But God accepted me just as I am?

"That was not judgment but good news. Years later, when I read Paul Tillich's famous sermon, 'You are Accepted,' I knew exactly what it meant, and I could hear the melody of the old hymn still humming on in the back of my mind." [Just As I Am, p. 151-152]

in a way that brought a smile to my face - -

a sermon the famous scholar/philosopher preached in chapel at Harvard & said - Krauth is essentially this — You are accepted by the which is great news to you .. + your only religious duty is to accept the fact that you are accepted ..

3-2 ~~3-9~~

Alternate beginning →

Life, I have been proposing in these talks ~~on these Sundays of Lent~~, is like a journey, a faith journey, a journey made sacred by the one who calls us to it, travels with us, and provides for our needs along the way.

We began by thinking about Sarah and Abraham who at the age of 75, settled, stable, satisfied where they are hear a summons to let go of their securities, pick up and move; they actually do it, actually trust God with their future and the adventure begins. expand..

→ And we thought next about the ~~children of Israel~~ the Exodus - Israel's liberation from Egypt slavery + the "murmuring in the wilderness" and wishing they were back where there was food and water. And we entertained the notion that when you do walk away from whatever provides you security, when you acknowledge your ultimate vulnerability, the emptiness of your hands - God provides. — what you need . .

So, this ~~morning~~ evening, Confidence - the sense that we can do it, can be faithful, can live up to our potential, can be true to the end. And another great story: this one about a man who would be and

(2) we began w that primal motif .. that God calls us to adventure : that to respond we have to let go of security .. and that God's promise is that God will be w/ us. in the journey + that it will be interesting + exciting. we learned from A.T.S. that faith is not avoiding evil - or believing ideas about God. but trusting God's promises .. + we thought about Jesus, who never asked people to sign a statement of faith .. but did ask men to follow ..

was King, Israel's most memorable leader, David. It is a magnificent saga. It has all the elements of a gripping novel or soap opera: intrigue, conspiracy, lots of sex and violence, family tragedy. Joseph Heller has written an irreverent but affectionate novel about the career of this remarkable man, God Knows. In it David says, "I don't like to boast, but I honestly think I've got the best story in the Bible. Old Sarah's fun, Abraham is ever up to the mark, Moses isn't bad, I have to admit, but he's very, very long with all those laws. Moses has the Ten Commandments, it's true, but I have better lines. I've got the poetry and the passion." [p. 5]

I read it again this AM & god even M ~~Cidevar~~ the Doubletree Gideon KJV Bible Middle of I Sam through II Samuel.. Read it--

I want to focus on the beginning of the story but it helps to put it in the context of his remarkable life. Several centuries have passed since the Exodus and the wandering in the wilderness. Israel's Sacred Journey has brought them to the land and now a monarchy is forming. Israel's first King, Saul,

Joshua fought his way city by city + after conquest they settled in.. tribal culture governed by Judges.. and

~~expand~~ - ~~sc~~

The common enemy which forces the issue + makes unification necessary is the Philistines – who the Greeks called a Palaestina – Palestinians

King, Saul, will start the unification of the Kingdom. David will succeed him and in several years forge a powerful nation-state out of twelve loosely organized tribes of wandering Semites. It is one of the major political and military achievements in all of history. David had to have been a brilliant strategist, an inspiring leader. He was also one of the most human characters in the Bible. David conquers, establishes Jerusalem as the capital of the Kingdom, makes it the center of the nation's religious life, leads worship there – dancing naked before the Lord. Conversely David, [illegible] to [illegible]'s daughter, falls in love with Bathsheba; she becomes pregnant; he arranges for her husband's death, marries Bathsheba; the child dies shortly after birth. David's grief is intense and public, but not as intense and public as a later grief when his son, Absalom, leads an armed insurrection against him and is murdered in order to save David. "Absalom, oh my son Absalom," he cries in one of the most poignant tragedies in all of literature.

which makes his wife very upset. He is married, consecutively, to Saul's daughter

David now the sovereign who the writer says "stays home on spring – the time when kings go to war." He doesn't have enough to do – is bored – is spending too much time gazing across the rooftops of his capital until one night he sees something he will never forget. He falls

he grieves until his closest friend tells him to stop.

And if you can stay with this story and aren't too embarrassed or scandalized by its humanness and earthiness, what comes through is a sense that if God can stay with David, can accept David and love him like a son - in spite of everything David does - just maybe there is room in the Kingdom for you and me. Just maybe there is a place in the wideness of God's love and grace and therefore room for a little confidence.

The story could not begin more modestly. Saul is through. God's man Samuel is scouring the countryside looking for a new king. If he knows who he's looking for, no one else does. He goes to Bethlehem to see a man who has a lot of sons.

And now we're ready to hear t[redacted] the beginning of the story

the 16th chapter of 1 Samuel:

use New RSV

"The Lord said to Samuel, 'How long will you grieve over Saul, seeing I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.'

3-

And Samuel said, 'How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me.' And the Lord said, 'Take a heifer with you, and say, "I have come to sacrifice to the Lord." And invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me him whom I name to you.' Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, 'Do you come peaceably?' And he said, 'Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; consecrate yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice.' And he consecrated Jesse and his sons, and invited them to the sacrifice. "When they came, he looked on Eli'ab and thought, 'Surely the Lord's anointed is before him.' But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.' Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he

said, 'Neither has the Lord chosen this one.' Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, 'Neither has the Lord chosen this one.' And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, 'The Lord has not chosen those.' And Samuel said to Jesse, 'Are all your sons here?' And he said, 'There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep.' And Samuel said to Jesse, 'Send and fetch him; for we will not sit down till he comes here.' And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. And the Lord said, 'Arise, anoint him; for this is he.' Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward."

The point is that the one who would appear least qualified is the one God wants to be King. Eli'ab had what it takes. Even Samuel was impressed. But God has other ideas. The point is that there is a dynamic at work in this situation,

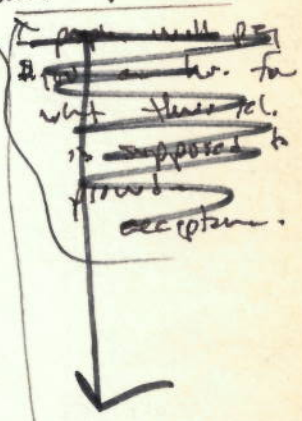
a dynamic built into the nature of reality, we believe, called grace. God is operating with a different set of criteria. God, this magnificent old text tells us from across 3,500 years, "sees not as (we) see." We look on outward appearances. God looks on the heart. So Jesse's strapping sons are rejected. God wants the little one, the child out in the field. Some later writer can't resist telling us that David was actually quite handsome. But the point has already been made. David doesn't get to be King because of his looks: in fact it is not because anything about David is kingly at all. It's because God sees something there which no one else can see. It's because God's love penetrates a lot of sins, covers, accepts, forgives, empowers. It's because we live in a state of grace.

The point - the point of the whole Bible - the point of Christianity - is that God's love is not based on the productivity, value or accomplishments of human beings. God loves us for who we are. "Just as we are," all unrealized

potential..

We know now about the psychology of grace. If grace is a bit of a stretch for you intellectually, clinical psychology will document its therapeutic reality. We know now that acceptance is very close to the beginning of the healing process; that part of what has to happen is a person's learning to accept, to "own" his or her own feelings, and that it is healing when the therapist does just that, perhaps for the very first time in the individual's entire experience - actually accepts him/her, doesn't judge or condemn or criticize, but accepts.

We know now the reality of grace in physiological terms. Medical science can tell us that there is the power of life in grace and love; that little ones eat more, sleep more, survive more when they are stroked, cuddled, rocked and loved. We know that one of the few things we can do for a newborn addicted to cocaine because of the mother's habit, is to hold on tightly and rock during the



hell of withdrawal.

There was a great teacher of pastoral care who said that people are so desperate for someone to listen they will pay $100 per hr. for it - the church is supposed to be providing

she focused + followed his hand + relaxed + her eyes brightened.. + she allowed herself to be cuddled. || She wasn't blind! || She wasn't brain damaged! She was unwanted, unloved, abused.. + she was saved, at least in the moment by a very determined + tough fm of love.. It's name is Grace.

T. Barry Brazelton is a Pedeatrician on the faculty of Harvard Medical School. He has studied + worked extensively in the area of infant + early childhood emotional disorders. He wrote an article for the NY Times. Why We are Failing our children - which observed that an unwanted, unloved child is damaged severely before he or she is a year old.

Brazelton tells about Crack babies.. who because of their addiction are not pretty + cuddly but are jerky, faces are contorted, cry in short piercing screams, + don't focus. You have to work at loving them. + because they can't focus.. are often diagnosed as blind.. or brain damaged

He tells about holding one little girl like that.. + literally forcing her to see a red ball he held in front of her face.. until finally..

hell of withdrawal. × Brazelton here -

We know now that there is a very elementary cause-and-effect relationship between grace and love. We don't love until we are loved. We enable our children to love by loving them. And we know, I suspect, more than we'd like to admit, about the pain of relationships from which grace is absent: the pain and anger of alienation... waiting for the other to make the first move, responding to one another's sullenness, getting angry at the other's anger, retreating further and further into the contained fortress of self... until the miracle of grace happens and one decides to stop keeping score and calculating offenses and waiting in stubborn resentment for the other to shape up - and simply walks across the room, becomes vulnerable and opens his or her arms and says, "I love you." Grace. The miracle.

And we know, but do not like to know, about the politics and economics of grace. My proposal for the most critical problem immediately

(+) We are created w/ the capacity.. but something has to call it out of us - activate it.

confronting our nation - ~~our city~~ - is urban violence. Chicago Tribune columnist, Clarence Page, wrote an excellent editorial ~~last week~~ about the frightening new phenomenon of urban young people killing one another for clothing - the right jacket, for instance. "Chicago may be leading the kill-for-clothes trend," he said. Whatever possesses a youngster to kill another youngster for a jacket I wonder, if it is not a complete absence of the value of human life. Page reflects:

"Poverty alone does not lead into crime. But those who think they have no money or no power undoubtedly have a tough time feeling good about themselves in a society that places so much value on money and power.

"The resulting lack of self-esteem can result in self-destruction, including drugs, crime, street gangs or other hazardous temptations that rush in to fill the self-worth vacuum....

"That might begin to explain," says Page, "why

Our response to urban violence is to build bigger jails. Our jails are already so crowded most cities are in defiance of their own laws. I read recently smutty I was happier not knowing .. There is a higher The nation that has imprisoned the highest percentage of its own citizens is not Iraq or Iran or Soweto or S. Africa or China - but the USA .. Wouldn't you think someone smart might get it .. it doesn't work .. ! Promising to put criminals behind bars may excite voters - but if it's all we can think of to do about urban violence .. we are morally bankrupt

young men in Harlem have a higher death rate than their counterparts in Bangladesh." [Chicago Tribune, 3/21/90]

When there is no grace in the system, when the traditional source of grace - namely stable, loving and accessible families - do not exist and where secondary sources of grace - well funded, safe and effective schools, and social services, even churches - are not visible, accessible or don't exist, then we should not be surprised at not only the inability to love, but the inability to care and the consequent absence of value about life - any life.

We live in a state of grace - or we aren't living much.

In the journey of life there have been people for most of us, who had confidence in us: who saw something in us no one else could see; saw something in us we ourselves didn't know was there, and had trouble believing was there. We have been blessed, most of us, by people along the way who in one way or another said "yes" to us, had confidence

in us and their confidence had a powerful effect. Almost in spite of ourselves we began to experience a little self-confidence, a little self-esteem. If the teacher thinks I can do it, maybe I can - maybe I can play the solo, memorize the lines, hit the ball, run for president. She thinks I can do this: thinks I could write poetry, do trigonometry, become an astronaut or a neurosurgeon... Maybe there is something here pretty important, at least potentially important. They are our saints - those cheerleaders who urged us on, and whose graceful confidence in us gave us confidence in ourselves.

We are blessed by them along the way. We are blessed by them still. And the astonishing assertion of Christianity is that even if you are not blessed by people who love and accept you and see potential in you and have confidence in you: even if you never have been blessed, there is one who loves you and accepts you and knows everything about you - all your flaws and failures and frailties - and still loves you, still sees your

I don't know what you think of when you say "I believe in the Communion of Saints" but that's what I think - my saints

potential, still has confidence in you.

One of the great ironies is that the religion whose purpose it is to announce this good news is often better at reminding us of our shortcomings than reminding us of our value: more eloquent in describing our sin than our potential: more effective in making us feel guilty than giving us confidence for the journey.

The great tragedy is that the Gospel is so frequently presented as a courtroom drama and we are on trial - rather than a reunion with the one who loves us unconditionally.

To the psychology of grace, the relationship of grace, the politics of grace - we add the grace of Jesus Christ which says that the one who created you loves you and accepts you and there is nothing you have ever done - or can do - that will change that love and that acceptance.

Oh, you can hide from it. You can ignore it. You can choose to argue with it and about it. You

You can try to tie strings to it, add citations to it...

can doubt it, disbelieve it and deny it. But you cannot change it. You can live as if you don't matter to anyone, but it isn't true because you do matter to someone. You can live as if your life has no value, but it isn't true. Your life is valuable to God.

David, back on the very edges of history, was one of the first to learn it. He was also a poet and although we cannot know for certain that he actually wrote Psalms, many of them are attributed to him, including the most beloved of them all, titled "A Psalm of David"...

And I like to think that the opening words:

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want..."

have something to do with that day he remembered all his life, when he was out shepherding keeping his father's sheep and old Samuel looked him in the eye, this non-descript wisp of a boy, and said - "This is the one."

And I like to think that all his life, on the day his baby died, the day he had to hide from his own troops, the day they told him his beloved son was dead - that David remembered that there was one who loved him and cared about him and had confidence in him.

And I like to remember that 1,000 years later, when Jesus, who had made the blind see, and the lame walk, and the oppressed and beaten down, the unlovely and unloved, stand up straight and tall... when he came riding into the city of Jerusalem one day, the crowds that came out to meet him said, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

And I like to think that as he faced that last Holy Week with high intentionality and incredible bravery... and as he died an almost intentional death, alone, that there was a strong confidence which came from his own faith that God's love for him was boundless.

And so, I like to think it is and will be for each of us.

"Amazing Grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once ~~was lost~~, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see."

Amen.

Before I begin, let me say again. what a privilege it is.

Thank - Dr. Biggs: could not have been more accomodating & gracious, even though he did intro. me as a Pentecostal.. (joke) : Life of busy church goes on and it is not easy to be gracious host & keep up daily round.

You can learn a lot about a church - a minister & the relationship in a very short period of time.: obviously there is something very good happening here. evidenced in your faithfulness, devotion.. caring & enjoyment of one another.. even the condition of this wonderful bldg.. You love this church - & its Lord.. and it has been good to be a part of it x & (Tulsa)

Thank committee for careful plans, hospitality. & for moving dates so I could go to Australia.

Choir -
& You

Randy Newman UC - Theol - scholarly.
work by not Nelson's Buffetcom
found it - too late - told wasn't -
a religious shrine

Read Ezekiel 37:1-6, 14
John 11:1, 17-27

THE SACRED JOURNEY

4. Power

John M. Buchanan

Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago

Scripture
Ezekiel 37:1-6, 14
John 11:1, 17-27

"And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live,..."
-Ezekiel 37:14a (RSV)

At the top of her career as a popular comedienne, so the story goes, someone asked Phyllis Diller to what she attributed her ability to make people laugh. She thought for a moment and said, "When you have the matter of death resolved, the rest is easy."

The distinguished psychologist, Abraham Maslow, was recuperating from a very serious heart attack when he wrote to a friend

"The confrontation with death - and the reprieve from it -makes everything look so precious, so sacred, so beautiful that I feel more strongly than ever the impulse to love it, to embrace it, to let myself be overwhelmed by it. My river has never

looked so beautiful... | Death, and its ever present possibility, makes love, passionate love, more possible. | I wonder if we could love passionately, if ecstasy would be possible at all if we knew we'd never die." [Rollo May, Love and Will, p. 99]

And so, ~~two weeks before Easter~~, (~~as preface to the drama of the passion, the entry~~ to ~~Jerusalem, the Last Supper, the trial and crucifixion,~~) we come to the question that lies beneath all our questions: | how shall we live in the presence of the reality of death?

~~It is the question behind~~ ~~No one ever put the issue more powerfully and~~ eloquently than Macbeth..., ~~for instance~~

> "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
> To the last syllable of recorded time:
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death..."

Along the way, this matter of death, | death in general and our death in particular, is something with which we must contend. | It is not easy to do so. | It is a topic easily and conveniently ignored. In a culture whose values are success, power,

Joeseph Sittler your 1970 B/C Lecturer, one of most thoughtful theologians of our generation. Prof. at U of C - who one more alive: | loved life music; Fr. Horn; Lit. & poetry; fine wine - wrote a theological essay once on the miracle of Polish Sausage.. Lived fully to the end.. Invited (Blind) Ham types preach at my ~~last~~ time | he agreed: | to discuss it? "I'll come to you"... He did - 80 + blind - ~~in Chi~~ by bus. The last thing he wrote was a book of essays Gravity + Grace - Last Chapter is Again + Letter G.. in it he says

"we must stop this conspiracy of silence about death + talk openly of it. | One can go to church a whole life time and never hear a sermon on death.. elderly people can teach younger ones it's OK to talk about it

the great literature of our race - Updike 4th + final in a series of Books that chronicles the mid 20th 50's 60's 70's-80's Rat Rest His finest

"Losing is like death" said Vince Lombardi, who knew a lot about winning.

winning - death is the ultimate irony... the ultimate, and inevitable loss. "The one who dies with the most toys wins." Perhaps, but the bottom line is not much of a victory.

Our way of life insultates us from dying... Birth and death, until recently happened mostly in the sterile isolation of a hospital room. Death is the new pornography, someone noted. Scotsman George Docherty used to say that in his native land sex was unmentionable and all the jokes were about death. Today, in this country, it's the other way around. Death is unmentionable and most of the jokes are about sex.

And then one day you bump into it: a dear friend dies, or you find you are looking at the obituaries with more personal attentiveness than usual, or suddenly, out of the blue, you are reminded of your own mortality. "Have you noticed that you will die?" Annie Dillard asks innocently. It is the most profound question with which the artist contends, the source either of a maddening despair, or perhaps the loveliest creativity. But

claims the bumper sticker on BMW..

At least we have allowed birth to re-enter mainstream; it's now a social event. Death used to be condemned to a tiny room full of cig. smoke, old issues of Life + Look + dog photos. Today Dad is in birthing room as matter-of-greeter, host, medical assistant + camera man..

And hospice - thank God.. for dear people who provide hospice service.. has helped many people.. by bringing death back into life. But we still have a long way to go

Birth and death, at least until fairly recently, unlike now, were hospice → mirror of NY Ave. P.C in Washington -

confront it we must, and you can either deal with this matter or push it away, back into the recesses of your mind where it will not stay for long. The famous existentialists Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus agreed that there is a sense in which you are not alive until you embrace your own death... which is surely part of what Abraham Maslow meant. And it is surely what happened to a peculiar prophet of Israel by the name of Ezekiel one day, but that does get us ahead of ourselves.

(1) The river never looked so beautiful before he confronted his mortality..

I have been proposing in these talks that ~~one of~~ a good way the ~~ways~~ to look at our own lives, is as journeys of faith, Sacred Journeys... that we are called to this journey by our creator, given provisions along the way, including the confidence we need. I have been proposing that the story of God's people in the scripture of the Old Testament, is, in a sense, a metaphor for the story of everyone of us; that we can see our own lives and experiences in the mirror of the Bible... the lives and experience of the individuals in the story; but also in the whole,

sweeping panorama.

So we thought about Abraham and Sarah: settled, mature, established, and how God called them to pack up and move and made an unlikely promise that they still had quite a future to live; and how it is the nature of God to call us to the adventure of living faithfully.

And we thought about the children of Israel after their unlikely liberation from Egyptian slavery, ("murmuring in the wilderness,") complaining to Moses because there was no food and no water, and how good the security of slavery looks when you are in the wilderness; and how when you know how hungry and empty and vulnerable you are, God provides for your deepest needs.

And we thought about how when God needs a King for Israel, the choice falls on someone who does not appear to be qualified, a wisp of a lad by the name of David, and we thought about God's love for and faithfulness to David even though David does some terrible things; and we considered the

mystery that there is nothing we can do to cause God to stop loving us. God sees possibility in all of us, and seeing our potential, has confidence in us.

Today, as we continue the story of God's people, their journey comes to a difficult time, a time of loss and grief; a time when it does not seem plausible that meaningful life can go on. That, too, is a metaphor for a stage in life's journey for each of us. But first the story.

It is about the exile, a very important period in Biblical history. In the year 598 B.C. the small Jewish state had become a nuisance to the ascendant Babylonian Empire: so the Babylonians carried off a small group of Jewish leaders from Jerusalem into Babylonian exile. A temple priest by the name of Ezekiel was among them. The Jerusalem government entered an unwise military pact with Egypt; the Babylonians became very angry, sent their army back in, this time leveling the city, executing the royal family, and exiling the

entire ruling class - the upper crust of Jerusalem society. It would appear to be the end of the line. After their escape from Egypt, wandering in the wilderness, the conquest and settling of the land, the unification of the people under a monarchy... it would appear that Israel was confronting the fate of every earthly kingdom - extinction. After years in Babylonian exile, the Jewish community would simply disappear, melt into the prevailing culture of Babylon. Ezekiel, without a temple to be a priest in, becomes a prophet and begins to interpret the events he is watching unfold, putting them in the larger context of God's will. And so it is that Ezekiel has a vision of a valley strewn with bones, an eloquent symbol of ~~death of~~ the his nation's prospects. Some historians suggest that there actually was such a valley, a battlefield where the armies of Israel lost to the Babylonian forces, that all those bones were what remained of Israel's fighting force, and that the exiles saw that sight on the long march

(+) Babylonians were crafty.. They did put Jews in concentration camps or even ghettos.. but invited them to settle in the Bab. culture God plan -

and the nation's existence - its life is at stake..

into captivity.

In any event, it is a grim, but powerful image. But, in his vision Ezekiel receives an astonishing promise. The bones will live. God will breathe breath into them and they will live. In the midst of death - life. In the midst of the most eloquent image of human mortality - God's dearest promise of power to go on living.

The promise of faith is that God's love is more powerful than death and that therefore, ultimately, there is no reason to fear. The Bible doesn't say much more than that on the subject. The church, of course, has speculated endlessly on who gets in and who doesn't; religion has been entranced with the topic... "the guest list and the decor of eternity," someone quipped. The Bible doesn't. What the Bible focuses on is the promise of God's eternal love which transforms death into life: despair into joy, and turns into power for living in the present for those who know it and trust it.

The * furniture of heaven + the temperature of hell. Reinhold Niebuhr said

Joe Sittler wrote .. The Bible says, "whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." Period. That word is immensely satisfying ...

"I will put my spirit in you and you will live," God says to the dry bones in Ezekiel's dream; and to anyone else who happens to feel like those bones, like death warmed over - which means all of us, sooner or later.

The simple truth is that on this journey there are going to be bad days. It is not possible ultimately to insulate yourself. It is not possible to love very long without sustaining a loss. Sigmund Freud taught that it is a primal and basic fear and that every small separation in life reminds us of final and ultimate separation.

It comes at us in different ways, of course. The death of a loved one, the death of our own grandparents and parents: the random death of dear friends.

People who measure stress say it is the most traumatic thing that will ever happen to us. Sometimes it comes in the form of the little losses that occur along the way; on the day when we must lower our expectations, and let go of a dream, and get realistic about the possibilities for the rest of the journey...

Very powerful play.. in which you experience both the crisis to life that occurs when love happens to a crusty, ~~sole~~ settled, middle aged bachelor - & then the terrible pain of loss.

fact is that at twenty-five you don't know many of the "company of heaven" except by reputation. Several decades later you know a lot of them: many of them. The same thing happens with the hymn: "For all the Saints Who from their Labors Rest." You sing it mostly unconsciously for twenty or thirty years, enjoying Ralph Vough Williams' robust tune - and either cringing at the images or else not thinking about them... "And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long, steals on the ear the distant triumph song, And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong, Alleluia! Alleluia!" And then someone you love dies - and the hymn becomes a very personal and powerful affirmation of something your intellect, your reason, cannot express or quite comprehend. I still think archangels sound like something the Episcopalians thought up, but the "whole company of heaven" is an idea I find I like more and more.

There is no more important life task than coming to terms with loss - finding some means to cope with the fact of loss and diminishment. Annie Dillard calls it "the extraordinary rent you have to pay as long as you stay." Author and columnist Judith Viorst has written a fine best seller, Necessary Losses, ~~the title of which I have shamelessly appropriated~~. Her thesis is that we not only have to endure an uninterrupted sequence of losses as long as we live, we grow as human beings into our fullness only to the degree that we cope with those losses: loss of loved ones, but also loss of ("romantic dreams, impossible expectations, illusions of power, and the loss of our own younger self.") [p. 2]

We grow by letting go, she says and her illustrations are both funny and also very poignant.

> "What am I doing with a mid-life crisis?" she asks.
>
> "This morning I was seventeen.
> I have barely begun the beguine and its
> good-night ladies already.
>
> While I've been wondering who to be
> when I grow up someday,
> my acne has vanished away and it's
> sagging kneecaps already." [p. 298]

Viorst writes from a feminine perspective but most men, I believe, can make a gender translation when she describes letting go of one thing after another: our waistlines, our vigor, our sense of adventure, our 20/20 vision, our trust in justice, our earnestness, our playfulness, our dream of being a tennis star, or a TV star, or a senator, or the woman for whom Paul Newman finally leaves JoAnne. We give up hoping to read all the books we once were bound to read, and to go to all the places we'd once vowed to visit. We give up hoping we'll save the world from cancer or from war. We even give up hoping that we'll succeed in becoming underweight." [p. 301]

The loss of a family member produces the highest stress and the most pain, but there are many losses along the way: the loss of children as they grow and move away; the loss of job by retirement or by being laid off; the loss of home and friends when we move to a new city; the loss of

A friend of mine went into a major depression when a fire destroyed his library + files - his life - he said

~~get realistic about the possibilities for the remainder of the journey.~~ worst here

And in this culture at this time it comes in the form of our obsession with youth and absolute refusal to acknowledge aging. || Dear Jessica Tandy struck a blow for all of us... but did you notice that the Health and Fitness ~~supplement~~ advertisement in the newspaper ~~last week was full of advertisements~~ are, not for ways to stay fit and healthy as you get older and the task becomes more difficult, but ads for liposuction and face lifts? That is, ways to deny the reality of aging and mortality.

How to live remains the question. How to find power to live in light of life's losses and the diminishments of aging and the personal insult of our mortality? How shall Israel live in exile? How shall we live through and beyond our losses?

The ancient promise is that death is part of God's economy, and that it is not an enemy, not because it isn't real and tragic, which it is, but because God's love creates life in its midst. Hard

I am cheered that Mark Spitz prepares for comeback - Nolan Ryan can still run a fast-ball - + Super Bowl MVP was oldest Player Back.

Did you ever actually see anybody in the work out room that actually looks like the people in the ads + TV commercials?

I haven't - The steam room in the ~~gym~~ health club I use - isn't anything you'd like to photograph!

Dr. Biggs - (tell me if I'm wrong) - talk to me about someone asking him for a recommendation of a ~~physician~~ ~~for your practice~~ for the people of prominent clubs - young physicians like you used to be

to believe? | You bet it is. | And yet, there is a gentle wisdom in God's economy; | people who have thought about it for very long and with any depth, seem always to conclude that there is a wisdom in this mortality of ours.

Maslow knew that without death there would be no love, no passion, no ecstasy.

John Updike in ~~his recently published memoir~~, Self Consciousness, closes with an essay in which he reflects on his own journey in maturing. "Aging," he says, "calls us outdoors, after the adult indoors of work and love-life and keeping stylish, into the lovely simplicities that we thought we had out-grown as children. | We come again to love the plain world, | its stone and wood, its air and water... | The act of seeing is itself glorious, and of hearing, and feeling and tasting." [p. 247] (x)

Frederick Buechner wrote that as a young man he would have jumped at the chance to remain young forever, but that he has changed his mind. "I love

we have grandchildren.. | not only am I married to a grandmoth - I am, indisputably, a grandfath. | Not only is there no denying it - I love it.. | And what I love - in addition to the fact that my daughter + hus. have ultimate responsibility (It is a free lunch!) | is the I am seeing things I forget - | or maybe didn't see.. | How absolutely beautiful a baby is - | how lovely a cry sounds - | how good a baby feels nuzzling as you hold him.. ~~It is~~ the act of seeing - is glorious now

H.'s memoir

wrote a poem about skiing - hurling 180 pds of saggy muscle + brittle bones down a slope ~~feet like a~~ walker + feel young

my life as much as I ever did and will cling to it for as long as I can, but life without death has become as unthinkable to me as day without night or waking without sleep."

There is a sense in which we are given the grace to love fully insofar as we acknowledge our mortality. And there is a sense in which we are given power to live fully insofar as we can trust God with our own death.

That is what is going on in the 11th chapter of the Gospel of John - in a New Testament story every bit as powerful and terrible and mysterious as Ezekiel's vision - the raising of Lazarus.

It is the event that immediately precedes Jesus' decision to go to Jerusalem. It is the event that so frightens everybody that the process is set in motion that will result in his arrest and crucifixion. The authorities understand with perfect clarity, that one who has power over death will threaten every other authority and power. So they determine, as soon as they hear about Lazarus,

to do away with him.

The exiled community must look at the reality of dry bones in order to know God's power of life.

Jesus must confront the death of his dear friend Lazarus - maybe his best and oldest friend... must go to the tomb on a blazing hot afternoon and there with the stench of death all around confront the fact of his own mortality. When he hears about Lazarus' death, he doesn't do anything for several days. Why? Because when you are thirty-three and your best friend dies and there's a rumor that your life is in danger... you simply don't want to have anything to do with it. And when he finally arrives at Bethlehem, Bethany he weeps for his dear dead friend, for friendship gone, but also for himself. Jesus, our brother, weeps tears of grief... for his own mortality.

What happened next will not be reduced to words and perhaps should not be...

But faith knows that God created life in the midst of death...

It's a very strong scene.

One of the peculiarities of this story is that

a fact that makes Martha (L's sis) angry.. she snaps at Jesus!

didn't he drop what he's doing and come.? well we don't know but I'm guessing it has something to do with the fact that

And that for Jesus, this drama will become personal, as personal as it can possible become; that he will know the end of his thirty-three year old life and will have to either give it up to despair and cynicism and rage - or trust it to God.

That is a metaphor for what comes to all of us and each of us on this journey.. that day - or string of days - when we know our mortality and must decide who we will trust and how we will live; that day when we must open our hands and let go of those we dearly love and give them up to God, and then noticing how empty our hands are - give our own death to God and in that giving, receive power to live.

The promise of the Gospel is this... in Jesus Christ God has loved us. That love gives us the gift of life... calls us to the adventure of living faithfully.. provides for our deepest needs... gives us confidence that we are adequate for the challenges and now, that love promises there is nothing ultimately to fear... There is no tragedy

Could here?

out of which God cannot call new life.

I do not know how Ezekiel saw what he saw and I do not know what happened that day when Jesus strode up to a tomb holding the dead body of his friend Lazarus, but I believe what he said there is for you and me:

"Take away the stone, come out, unbind him and let him go."

That's for you and me.

A week from today began ~~Even though the church must now journey through~~ the next difficult days of Lent: days for the remembering of the triumph of Palm Sunday turned into tragedy; for remembering betrayal and denial, humiliation and suffering... and finally - the tragic, beautiful mystery of Good Friday... even though the journey now becomes arduous, as it does for all of us along the way, it is a Sacred Journey, particularly now because of the one who said,

"I am the resurrection and the life: he who believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live..."

+ + +

4- 15

Thanks Be to God ..

You are a child of God
God created you - calls you to the adventure of your life. God will provide ... God accepts you - has confidence in you - sees more in you than you ever have. God loves you - always - ~~will separate you~~ ever [illegible]

will ever separate you from

along the way of

your Sacred Journey.

Thanks Be